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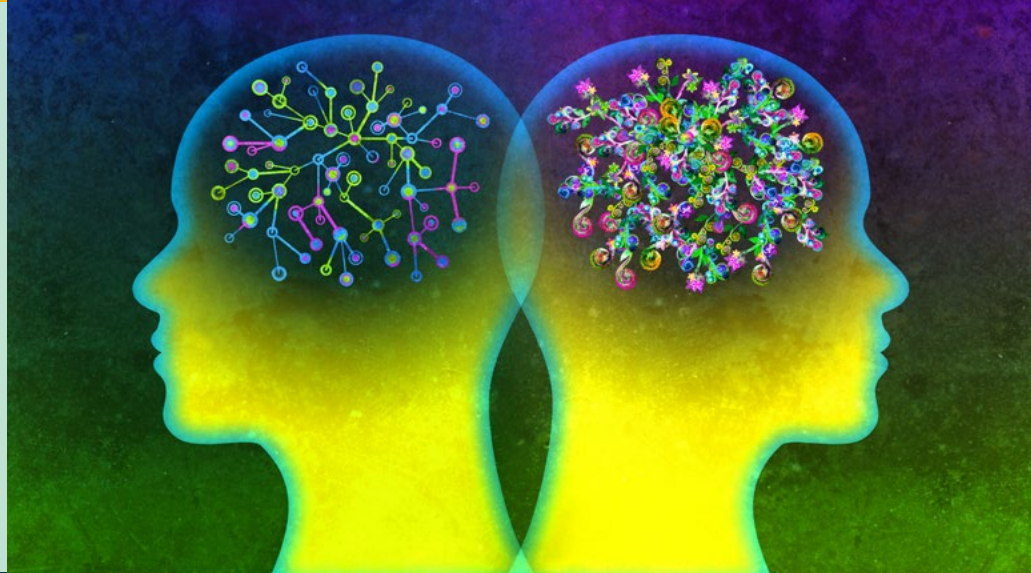
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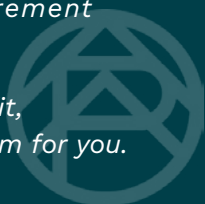
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Expanding Lawyer Well-Being: Neurodiversity in the Legal Profession

by Douglas S. Querin

One important dimension of well-being that has gained increasing attention in the last few years is neurodiversity. Neurodiversity recognizes that human brains naturally vary in how they develop, process information, communicate, focus attention, and experience the world. These neurological differences are part of normal human variation.

What Is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the natural diversity of human cognition. The term emerged in the late 1990s¹ and reflects a shift from viewing certain neurological patterns exclusively through a

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deficit-based medical lens toward understanding them as normal variations in human functioning.

Individuals whose cognitive processing differs from what is considered statistically typical are often described as neurodivergent. Neurodiversity itself is not a diagnosis. Rather, it is an umbrella concept that includes a range of neurodevelopmental conditions and cognitive profiles. These may involve both areas of strength and areas where support may be helpful.

Autism Spectrum Condition.² Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference that often influences social communication, information processing, and sensory experience. A person with autism may process social cues differently, prefer predictability, develop deep and sustained interests, or experience heightened or reduced sensitivity to sensory input.

Autism exists along a broad spectrum, and support needs vary considerably. Many autistic people demonstrate strong attention to detail, sustained focus, pattern recognition, and the ability to analyze complex systems—capacities that can align well with legal work.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).³ A person with ADHD experiences differences in attention regulation, activity level, and executive functioning. Tasks that lack intrinsic interest may require greater effort to initiate or sustain. Organization, time estimation, and working memory may require structured support.

At the same time, many people with ADHD bring creativity, rapid problem-solving, adaptability, high energy, and the ability to respond effectively in dynamic or high-pressure environments.

Dyslexia.⁴ A person with dyslexia processes written language differently. Reading and spelling may require additional time or alternative strategies, even when reasoning ability and intelligence are strong. Dyslexia is not related to motivation or effort.

Many dyslexic individuals demonstrate strong verbal reasoning, big-picture conceptual thinking, creativity, and strategic insight—qualities that are highly valued in legal practice.

Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Differences).⁵ A person with dyspraxia may experience differences in motor coordination, sequencing, and task execution. Handwriting, physical organization, or complex sequencing tasks may require adaptive strategies.

Many dyspraxic individuals develop strong verbal reasoning, planning skills, and problem-solving abilities as they build effective compensatory approaches.

Tourette Syndrome.⁶ A person with Tourette Syndrome can experience involuntary motor or vocal tics that may fluctuate in frequency and intensity. Tics are often influenced by stress, fatigue, or environmental factors.

Tourette Syndrome does not affect intelligence. Many individuals with Tourette Syndrome develop exceptional resilience, self-awareness, persistence, and coping skills as they navigate fluctuating symptoms.

Neurodiversity in the Legal Profession

Neurodiversity has always existed within the legal profession. Lawyers with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, and related profiles practice successfully across all sectors of law. For many, neurodivergence is merely one dimension of identity.

Estimates suggest that a significant percentage⁷ of the general population is neurodivergent. Yet disclosure rates within the legal profession remain comparably low. In competitive and high-performance environments, lawyers may hesitate to disclose neurological differences out of concern that they will be misunderstood.

Neurodivergent lawyers who don't disclose may engage in "masking"⁸—intentionally or unintentionally adjusting communication style, work patterns, or behavior to align with perceived expectations. While many succeed, sustained masking can require considerable cognitive and emotional effort, which, over time, may contribute to fatigue and diminished well-being.

The Workplace

Legal workplaces have traditionally assumed uniform approaches to attention, communication, time management, and social engagement. When those assumptions do not align with an individual's cognitive style, tension can occur. Examples of potential workplace tensions may include:

- High levels of background noise or frequent interruptions that increase sensory overload;
- Extended networking or meetings that require sustained social processing;
- Multiple overlapping deadlines that strain executive functioning;
- Performance expectations tied to stylistic norms rather than substantive outcomes; and
- Limited flexibility in work structure or task sequencing.

Importantly, these tensions do not reflect a lack of competence. There is finally a growing recognition that thoughtful workplace design and neurological variation can, in fact, functionally coexist in a collaborative way that honors the neurodiversity of all.

Strengths and Contributions

Many neurodivergent lawyers demonstrate distinctive capacities that strengthen legal practice, including:

- Sustained focus and persistence;
- Strong analytical reasoning and pattern recognition;
- Creative and original approaches to complex problems;
- High integrity and careful attention to detail; and
- Innovation in technology-driven or data-intensive areas.

The legal profession already values these traits. Recognizing that they may be associated with neurological diversity allows organizations to cultivate them creatively and with thoughtful deliberation.

Communication differences may also be present. Some neurodivergent lawyers communicate directly and literally; others require additional processing time before responding; still others prefer written clarity over spontaneous verbal exchange. When understood in context, these variations represent differences in style rather than in professional skills.

Neurodiversity should also be considered at the institutional level. Billing models, supervisory expectations, open-office designs, and evaluation systems frequently assume a single model of functioning. Expanding awareness of cognitive diversity invites reconsideration of those assumptions.

Expanding Well-Being and Opportunity

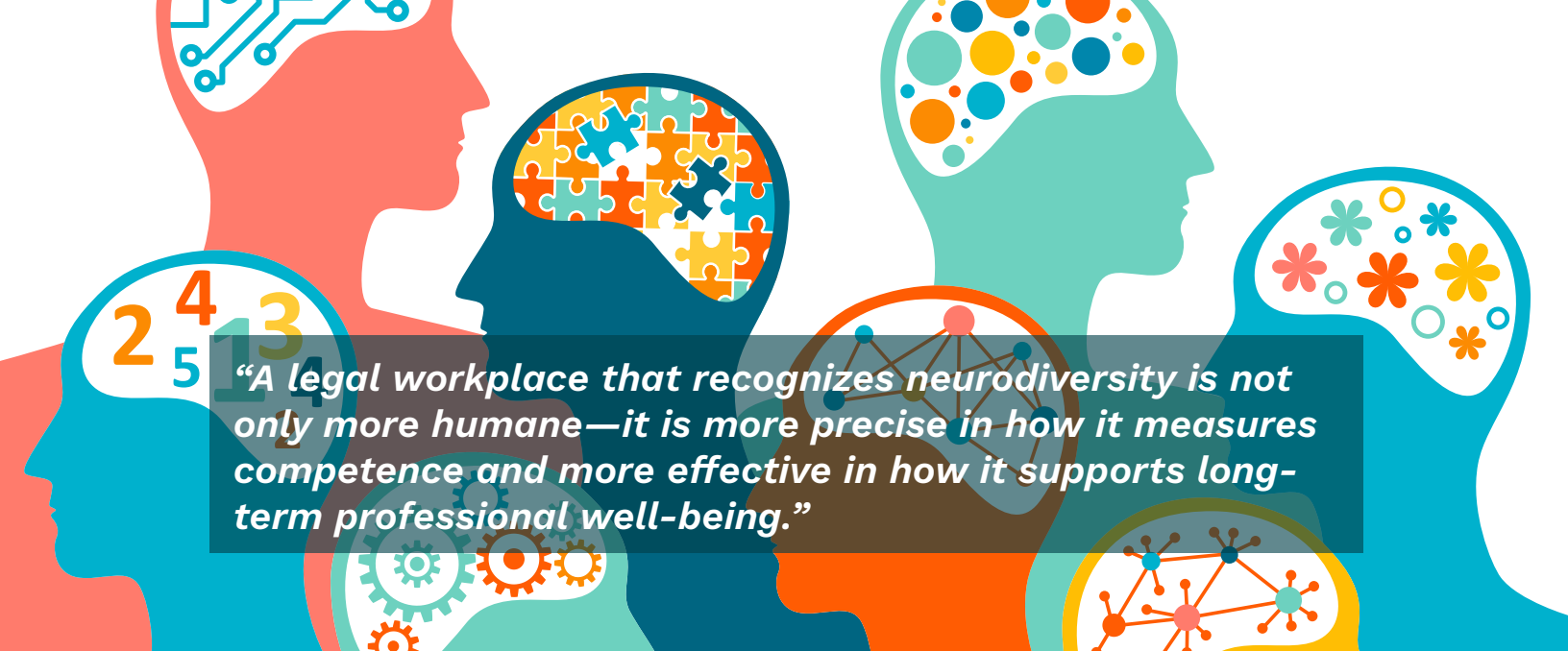
Understanding neurodiversity in the legal profession is not solely about compliance or accommodation. It is about aligning workplace structures with cognitive diversity in ways that enhance well-being, retention, and performance.

Greater understanding reduces misinterpretation. Differences in pacing, organization, or communication may otherwise be attributed to a lack of motivation or poor judgment. When colleagues understand these differences as natural variations in neurological processing, feedback becomes more accurate, performance better understood, and advancement more attainable.

Mindfulness Group

This **winter**, the OAAP will offer a group for lawyers who want to learn how to implement mindfulness-based practices in their lives. The group will be held remotely and facilitated by **OAAP Attorney Counselors Kyra Hazilla and Kirsten Blume**.

If you are interested in this group or for more information, please contact Kirsten at 503.226.1057 ext. 11, or kirstenb@oaap.org.



“A legal workplace that recognizes neurodiversity is not only more humane—it is more precise in how it measures competence and more effective in how it supports long-term professional well-being.”

Many workplace practices that support lawyers with neurodivergent profiles are straightforward and beneficial to all professionals. These include:

- **Clear communication:** written follow-up to verbal instructions; explicit priorities and deadlines;
- **Predictable workflows:** advance notice of deadlines and meetings; reduced last-minute changes;
- **Time-management support:** task-management tools, visual schedules, or reasonable flexibility;
- **Flexible work structures:** remote or hybrid work; alternative task sequencing where feasible;
- **Adjusted performance evaluation:** emphasis on quality and accuracy over speed or style;
- **Executive functioning support:** shared task lists, checklists, and brief, regular check-ins;
- **Reduced sensory overload:** access to quiet spaces, noise-reducing tools, or flexible office layouts;
- **Education and training:** normalizing neurodiversity and reducing stigma through awareness; and

- **Strength-based task assignment:** aligning work with individual strengths and core legal skills.

These approaches emphasize clarity, fairness, and outcome-based evaluation—principles already central to the legal profession. When workplace expectations are explicit and flexible enough to accommodate normal cognitive variation, all lawyers are better positioned to contribute fully and sustainably.

Conclusion

Neurodiversity describes the natural variability of human cognition and has always been present in the legal profession. What is changing is the profession’s willingness to recognize, understand, and accept it.

Lawyers who are neurodivergent contribute meaningfully to modern legal practice. Despite this, there may be times when workplace design and expectations create unnecessary strain. When that tension is misinterpreted, opportunity narrows. When it is understood as differences in normal neurological processing, opportunity expands.

For a profession committed to analysis, fairness, and ethical responsibility, acknowledging cognitive diversity is an appropriate and timely step toward a more sustainable practice of law. A legal workplace that recognizes

neurodiversity is not only more humane—it is more precise in how it measures competence and more effective in how it supports long-term professional well-being. ●

– **DOUGLAS S. QUERIN**
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OTHER WORKS BY DOUG QUERIN AT OAAP.ORG

inSight

- A Companion Guide for Lawyers Living With Grief (and Those Who Walk Beside Them) (Winter 2026)
- An Intelligent Response: AI Counseling vs. Human Counseling (Fall 2025)
- Lawyer Well-Being: The How-To of Managing Distress (Spring 2025)

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Upcoming CLE – Navigating the Demands of Practice

Legal practice places heavy demands on the cognitive skills that support planning, focus, time management, and follow-through—known as executive functioning. This presentation offers practical, systems-based approaches that reduce cognitive load and support a sustainable law practice.

Presented by the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program and the PLF Practice Management Assistance Program, the webinar will be held on **Tuesday, September 29, 2026**. Registration information will be sent by broadcast email.

This CLE has been approved for 1 MHSU and 1 Practical Skills MCLE credits.



“... strong analytical reasoning, pattern recognition, persistence, and deep focus—traits valued in law—are often associated with cognitive diversity.”

Myth vs. Reality: Neurodiversity in the Legal Workplace

by Douglas S. Querin

People with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, and other neurodevelopmental differences have always been part of the legal profession. Historically, many have worked successfully without openly discussing their neurological profiles, often adapting their working styles to align with prevailing workplace expectations.

As the legal profession’s focus on lawyer well-being has expanded, so too has attention to neurodiversity in the legal workplace. With that attention comes an opportunity for law practice leadership to distinguish myth from reality and ensure that performance is assessed accurately, fairly, and sustainably.¹

1. MYTH: Neurodiversity is rare in the legal profession.

REALITY: Neurological diversity is a normal feature of any professional population, including law. Many lawyers and staff members with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, or related profiles practice successfully in a wide range of legal roles. Because disclosure is personal and voluntary:

- Lawyers frequently work alongside neurodivergent colleagues without knowing it.
- Many neurodivergent legal professionals choose not to disclose unless a specific workplace adjustment is needed.

Neurodiversity is not an anomaly in legal practice; it is a normal part of the human condition. Moreover, strong analytical reasoning, pattern recognition, persistence, and deep focus—traits valued in law—are often associated with cognitive diversity.

2. MYTH: Workplace adjustments lower performance standards.

REALITY: Workplace adjustments do not reduce expectations. They remove unnecessary barriers so that individuals can meet existing standards. In practice:

- Deadlines, quality requirements, and ethical obligations remain unchanged.
- Adjustments often increase accuracy, reliability, and efficiency.
- Many adjustments involve modest changes in communication or workflow—not altered standards.

The goal is equal opportunity to perform, not reduced accountability.

3. MYTH: Adjustments are expensive and/or disruptive.

REALITY: Most workplace adjustments in legal settings are low-cost or no-cost. Examples include:

- Clear written follow-up to verbal instructions;
- Advance notice of deadlines or meetings;
- Access to quiet or lower-distraction workspaces;
- Predictable scheduling when possible; and
- Flexibility in how tasks are sequenced.

When costs arise, they are typically modest. Disruption, if any, more often results from avoidable misunderstandings, turnover, or preventable performance friction.

4. MYTH: Lawyers with neurodivergent profiles cannot succeed in client-facing or interpersonal roles.

REALITY: Success depends on clarity, structure, and role alignment—not neurological style. Lawyers with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, or related differences often excel in:

- Client counseling where clarity and precision are valued;
- Complex litigation and transactional analysis;
- Compliance, research, drafting, and regulatory interpretation; and
- High-stakes analytical problem-solving.

When challenges arise, they are typically the result of unclear expectations, excessive cognitive load, or ambiguous feedback—not lack of ability.

5. MYTH: A request for a workplace adjustment must disclose detailed diagnostic information.

REALITY: Employees are not required to provide comprehensive medical explanations to supervisors. Effective management focuses on:

- Functional needs (to support strong performance);
- Observable workplace impact; and
- Practical adjustments that improve outcomes.

Management does not need clinical knowledge or expertise. They need clarity, responsiveness, and a structured approach to dialogue.

“Neurodiversity reflects natural cognitive variation within the profession. It is not a flaw to be corrected but a workplace reality to be understood and managed thoughtfully.”



6. MYTH: Treating people differently is unfair.

REALITY: Fairness in professional settings means equal opportunity to meet standards—not identical treatment. Legal workplaces already individualize:

- Mentorship;
- Work assignments;
- Business development opportunities; and
- Scheduling for health or family responsibilities.

Workplace adjustments for neurological differences typically fit comfortably within existing professional norms of individualized supervision.

7. MYTH: Differences in communication style reflect attitude or professionalism problems.

REALITY: Communication styles naturally vary across neurological profiles. Differences may include:

- Direct or literal language;

- Reduced emphasis on small talk;
- Preference for written communication;
- Additional processing time before responding; or
- Differences in eye contact or nonverbal expression.

These are normal variations in communication style—not reflections of character or commitment. Clear, structured communication benefits entire teams regardless of neurological profiles.

8. MYTH: Supervisors must become experts in neuropsychology.

REALITY: Effective leadership requires curiosity, consistency, and clarity—not diagnostic expertise. Best supervisory practices include:

- Asking what helps someone do their best work;
- Providing explicit expectations and priorities;
- Offering predictable, concrete feedback; and
- Evaluating performance based on results and ethical standards, not stylistic conformity.

These practices improve management across the board.

9. MYTH: Workplace adjustments increase legal risk.

REALITY: Legal risk more commonly arises when adjustment requests are ignored, differences are mischaracterized as misconduct, or dialogue is avoided.

Thoughtful, documented engagement in good-faith problem-solving typically reduces exposure and strengthens retention.

The Bottom Line for Law Practice Leadership

Neurodiversity reflects natural cognitive variation within the profession. It is not a flaw to be corrected but a workplace reality to be understood and managed thoughtfully.

Law firms and legal organizations that respond with clarity, flexibility, consistency, and respect create environments where lawyers can perform competently and sustainably. Doing so strengthens performance, reduces unnecessary turnover, and upholds the profession's commitment to fairness and sound judgment. ●

– **DOUGLAS S. QUERIN**
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ENDNOTES

1. The information and observations contained in this sidebar are provided for general educational and informational purposes only. They do not constitute legal advice, nor should they be relied upon as a substitute for consultation with qualified legal counsel. Employment-related matters, including workplace adjustments, disability law compliance, and personnel management decisions involve fact-specific legal considerations. Organizations and individuals should seek advice from a qualified legal advisor regarding their particular circumstances.

Navigating the SPPE: A Support Group for Provisionally Licensed Lawyers

This fall, the OAAP will offer a new eight-session peer support group for lawyers who are provisionally licensed through the Supervised Practice Portfolio Examination program. In this confidential group, participants will build community and share information and experiences with similarly situated lawyers. Sessions will foster connectedness in the legal community and scaffold participants so they will be well-supported to move through provisional licensure with intention and authenticity. This group will be facilitated by **OAAP Attorney Counselor Bryan Welch and Attorney Counselor Associate Bridget Donegan**. For more information, please contact Bryan (bryanw@oaap.org) or Bridget (bridgetd@oaap.org).

Developing Healthy Boundaries

This fall, the OAAP will offer a free and confidential workshop designed to help you create healthy boundaries in your personal and professional lives. The in-person workshop will be held at the OAAP office in Portland. The workshop facilitators will be **OAAP Senior Attorney Counselor Doug Querin and Attorney Counselor Kirsten Blume**.

If you are interested in this group or for more information, please contact Kirsten at 503.226.1057 ext. 11, or kirstenb@oaap.org.



The Language of Neurodiversity

by Douglas S. Querin

Language influences how people are perceived, evaluated, and supported in virtually all environments where they live and work together. Current research across neurodiversity fields makes clear that terminology can either reinforce stigma or promote accurate understanding, inclusion, and well-being.

The comments and suggestions below are simple, research-based guidelines to assist all those in the legal workplace today. The goal is not political correctness—it is clarity, respect, and effective communication.

Language suggestions:

1. Encourage → Neutral, Respectful, Person-First Language

- “Person with ADHD / autism / dyslexia / Tourette Syndrome”
- “Neurodivergent lawyer” or “lawyer with a neurodivergent profile”
- “Different cognitive or information-processing style”
- “Support needs” or “workplace adjustments”
- “Benefits from clear written instructions”
- “Works best in a lower-distraction environment”

These phrases describe function and context without judgment.

2. Encourage → Focus on Work Impact, Not Labels

- “What helps you do your best work?”
- “What structure or clarity would be useful here?”
- “Let’s identify adjustments that support performance.”

Research shows that focusing on functional needs rather than diagnostic labels improves both communication and outcomes.

3. Encourage → Respect Individual Preference

Preferences vary. Some individuals prefer person-first language (“they are a person with autism”), while others prefer identity-first language (“they are an autistic person”). When appropriate, simply ask or follow the person’s lead.

4. Discourage → Use of Stigmatizing or Deficit-Based Terms

Avoid language that implies damage, inadequacy, or character flaws, such as:

- “Suffers from,” “afflicted with,” “victim of”
- “Defective,” “broken,” “not normal”
- “Problem employee,” “difficult personality”
- “High-functioning” or “low-functioning”
- “Can’t handle pressure” (when the issue is workload)

These terms are generally imprecise and often inaccurate.

5. Discourage → Confusing Style Differences with Ability or Professionalism

Differences in communication or work style may reflect normal neurological variation rather than attitude. For example:

- Direct communication ≠ disrespect.
- Reduced eye contact ≠ disengagement.
- Request for written instructions ≠ incompetence.
- Need for structure ≠ lack of initiative.

6. Caution → Use Clinical Terms Only When Necessary

Words such as “disorder,” “impairment,” or diagnostic labels may be appropriate in medical or legal documentation contexts (e.g., ADA compliance processes). In everyday workplace communication, neutral descriptions tend to be clearer and less stigmatizing.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Neurodiversity language should:

- ✓ Be respectful
- ✓ Be accurate
- ✓ Focus on work function and support
- ✓ Avoid unnecessary judgment
- ✓ Follow individual preference when known

Clear, respectful language improves trust, performance, and workplace culture — and helps leaders evaluate lawyers based on competence rather than assumptions. ●

– **DOUGLAS S. QUERIN**
JD, LPC, CADC I
Senior Attorney Counselor, OAAP



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“I just need the systems in place that help me, that keep me on track to get my work done. When this sort of brain is harnessed, I think it’s an asset.”



Conversations with Neurodivergent Lawyers

by Kyra Hazilla and Bryan Welch

Hearing from neurodivergent lawyers about their experiences in their own words is an important part of understanding neurodiversity in the legal profession. OAAP Attorney Counselors Kyra Hazilla and Bryan Welch interviewed two Oregon lawyers who identify as neurodivergent. In the conversations that follow, they share insights from their personal journeys, including the decision whether to disclose, the stigma they still feel, common misunderstandings, what they wish their colleagues knew, and the neurodivergent superpowers they bring to their legal careers.

Q&A with Kyra Hazilla

Kyra: Have you disclosed your neurodivergence and what influenced your decision?

Yes. Initially it was mostly to avoid being yelled at. I was hoping that disclosing would help, but instead I learned that people really don’t know what neurodiversity means. I remember telling a colleague that I was neurodivergent. They thanked me for telling them, which was so reassuring to me. However, within two weeks, they were back to yelling at me.

Now that I am in a public-facing role, there is a decent chance that some of the people who are appearing in front of me are also neurodivergent. If they disclose, I will also

disclose. It seems to be very helpful for people because I do actually understand and can tell people what to expect. I find that disclosing is better than not disclosing, but occasionally, I find myself expected to be the voice of ALL neurodivergent people, which is a bit awkward.

Because I have disclosed, I have had people actually admit openly to me that they discriminated against me because I am neurodivergent. Though that was not what I was hoping would happen when I disclosed, it did allow me to find the path toward my current role.

Before I was aware of the label, especially as a younger person, navigating the neurotypical world was overwhelming and confusing. I

realized that's how many people experience the court system. In my current role, the way I process information informs how I describe things to people. It is so satisfying to demystify the process for others by providing information in a way that would have been helpful for me. I try to be as transparent as possible.

Do you think people should disclose their neurodivergence?

If you think it would be helpful in terms of improving your ability to work and communicate effectively, then yes.

A good portion of my comedy stand-up set featured the fact that I was neurodivergent, so basically I disclosed during every performance. I sought out the diagnosis when I was talked into going back on stage by a friend after I had practiced law for over ten years. I needed a "hook" but can't juggle or do impressions, so I thought I would be the "Aspergian comic." After many calls to neuropsychology professionals who kept asking "How old is your child?" I finally found someone who did adult assessments. It was incredibly liberating to be able to not have to worry about presenting myself in a way that didn't freak neurotypicals out. I totally turned off my internal editor. I'm not sure how I feel about blowing the curve on Simon Baron-Cohen's Autism-Spectrum Quotient test though...

What do you wish your colleagues understood?

Amazingly, my current colleagues GET me. Remarkably, these are people I used to appear in front of, and our relationships are very different than they used to be.

What is your superpower?

My superpower is that I am aware that I don't have a superpower. However, for purposes of this question I would say it is my ability to deconstruct the law to make it accessible to me, and, by extension, to others. It positively affected my practice as a lawyer—I wouldn't have moved to my current role without first understanding myself as a lawyer.

What's the most common misunderstanding about neurodivergent people?

That we are emotionless. We feel emotions, we just don't express them the same way you do. We rely much less on hugging.

Q&A with Bryan Welch

Bryan: When did you first recognize your neurodivergence?

I was diagnosed later in life. I had a history of overworking and burnout that wasn't being fixed through rest, etc. So I sought an ADHD diagnosis and easily passed the screening. And then it clicked for me, all of my history growing up, of struggling in school, starting around age 11, maybe even 10, probably earlier than that. I really noticed it, having to spend lots of extra hours studying. It sort of became an "a-ha" moment, thinking through not just school and career, but also relationships and habit formation. It has been an uphill battle.

Have you disclosed your neurodivergence at work?

I have not made a specific disclosure to my supervisor or HR. But I did start to experience some borderline retaliation activity by a coworker, so I informed my HR person via email that although I have an ADA-covered disability, I wasn't asking for accommodation at this time. But I wanted it on record in the event that I need an accommodation in the future. So, I've sort of laid the groundwork and that gave me some confidence. I have also shared it with a couple of colleagues when they disclosed to me that they're ADHD. I've felt some relief knowing I'm not alone. I still worry about the stigma and potential retaliation. I haven't otherwise disclosed it in a positive way. It's been more of a defense mechanism.

So your nondisclosure is because of the stigma and fear of retaliation?

Yes. And when it comes to the stigma, I still have concern. So, there are two things in the

practice of law that I think can rub against an ADHD brain. One is keeping up with deadlines, and the other is how you communicate. The issue is how our neurodivergence can show up in both of those areas. I think there's still a commonplace misunderstanding that we can control ADHD—people can control their neurodivergence—and that it's sort of a moral failing or laziness that leads to some of our executive dysfunction. There's a stigma around mental differences and accommodations. But I think specifically within the law, there's an expectation that lawyers should have it all together, and we're very punctual and precise. So if I disclose that I have ADHD, I fear being looked down upon as less intelligent, less capable, rather than it being an explanation that "Oh, there could be a difference in function when they're overstimulated."

What is a common misunderstanding about neurodivergent lawyers that you've encountered?

I think the intensity that neurodiverse lawyers can have around protecting their clients, or about an issue they think is of great concern, can be viewed as adversarial or aggressive. The reality is that we have a lot of passion, and things feel very urgent, and so when we're dealing with clients who could have real consequences that could affect their life or safety, I feel activated as a neurodivergent person to do my best for them. And I find that some people misinterpret that passion as aggression, or being a know-it-all, or they don't see my assertiveness in a good light. So I think there's a misunderstanding regarding communication style. I also think that people use the idea of ADHD as a sort of crutch to explain how or why they aren't performing, versus, recognizing that there really are true neurological differences, and we are living in a neurotypical world, doing our best. I think we have really good intentions most of the time.

What do you wish colleagues understood about working with you?

In general, our society could benefit from having some more patience and not treating everything so urgently. I actually think sometimes

Save the Date: OAAP 2026 Well-Being Retreat

We are pleased to announce that this year's Well-Being Retreat for Lawyers Identifying as Women or Nonbinary will be held October 23-24, 2026, in Welches, Oregon.

Join your colleagues for a weekend of connection and community with time for relaxation and fun! Look for registration information on oaap.org in the next month.

neurodivergent people are canaries in the coal mine of evidencing how overstimulation can lead to overwhelm and burnout. And I think that's actually more about the pace of our society—the text messaging, calls, emails—all this expectation of responsiveness is actually more of the problem than an issue of neurodivergence. So I'd rather my colleagues realize that we have assets to offer, rather than just slowing them down, or whatever the heck they're worried about.

What do you think is the biggest challenge you've faced as a neurodivergent lawyer?

I think perfectionism is a really challenging trait that many neurodivergents struggle with, and the practice of law is ripe with opportunities for fear-based thinking around perfectionism. I find that sometimes the standards are unrealistic, and the pace is extremely challenging. The other challenge for me is communication style and recognizing how I come across in an email or in a meeting. I feel I'm being to-the-point and assertive, but that can be viewed as aggressive. The practice of law involves a lot of communication and relationship building, so it can be challenging to continue to have to self-regulate in difficult conversations and difficult matters.

Do you consider yourself having a superpower related to your neurodiversity?

Absolutely!! I think that I have a really good heart and have strong empathy skills. I've never struggled with the question of "How do you help people feel included in the room when there are different voices, different people?" Because that's come very naturally to me ever since I was a kid. So I think my compassion helps me be a good person, and that's something I value. I also think I recognize patterns in a way that I can attribute to neurodivergence. I'm a systems thinker, and that results in better legal advice because I'm thinking a few steps ahead and can leverage some of that broader thinking—systems thinking. It also helps me in my job because I have to think of many different regulatory provisions and schemes at the same time. My work is quite complex, but my neurodivergence helps me do that, I believe. I think it helps me to juggle a lot of balls at the same time. I just need the systems in place that help me, that keep me on track to get my work done. When this sort of brain is harnessed, I think it's an asset.

What is one thing you think the legal community or the profession could do to better support or be inclusive of neurodivergent lawyers?

I think the legal community can work on removing stigma and being more aware of the scientific understanding of what it means to have neurodivergence, how that shows up. We really only hear about it as people acting out in class when they're kids and being late with their assignments. So just recognizing the many different ways that neurodivergence shows up in people's life experience would help people understand why, for example, there's a lot of self-medication through alcohol. I think we're starting to do better around substance abuse support for the legal community. But I think creating more awareness and helping neurotypical people understand some of the many ways in which neurodivergence impacts us would be helpful.

Is there anything else that you would like people to know?

I think one thing that has helped me to move from surviving to thriving is recognizing that I'm not alone in this community. It can feel extremely lonely for a long time, and like it's a personal failing to have this wiring, but this is a lifetime diagnosis. Learning how to dance with ADHD or other neurodivergence rather than fighting it is where real change can happen, and part of that is having community. Even though it feels scary at first to open up about neurodiversity, I've found that it leads to better understanding, and frankly, reduces my own self-judgment which feels so freeing. I would encourage anyone who's wondering about how to look at this to embrace it. That really, the only way out is through. Continuing to either numb or try to outrun your neural wiring is not healthy. It's not going to lead to great outcomes. Recognizing that really does decrease suffering—I know that from my own experience. I definitely do not judge people for having a hard time figuring out this path. Everyone deserves support.

We are very grateful to these individuals for their willingness to engage in conversations with us and with the community, and for offering us a window into some of the strengths and challenges of our neurodivergent colleagues in the law. ●

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Career Resources from the OAAP

FINDING MEANINGFUL WORK

The OAAP holds a periodic 6-session self-reflection, support, and skills group for lawyers making or contemplating job or career transitions. The group assists lawyers in identifying their professional values and priorities, discerning a purposeful path forward, and honing job search skills. To participate or for more information about the next group, please contact **Attorney Counselor Associate Bridget Donegan** at 503.226.1057 ext. 14 or bridgetd@oaap.org.

CAREER SUPPORT AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

The OAAP attorney counselors can help you assess your career opportunities and support you in your career path. If you would like information about self-assessment or career support, contact **Senior Attorney Counselor Doug Querin**, 503.226.1057 ext. 12, douglasq@oaap.org; **Director Kyra Hazilla**, ext. 13, kyrah@oaap.org; **Attorney Counselor Bryan Welch**, ext. 19, bryanw@oaap.org; **Attorney Counselor Kirsten Blume**, ext. 11, kirstenb@oaap.org; or **Attorney Counselor Associate Bridget Donegan**, ext. 14, bridgetd@oaap.org.

Accommodations

The OAAP is committed to providing accessible events. For accessibility or accommodation requests, please call the OAAP at 503.226.1057 or toll-free 800.321.6227, ext. 19, or email **Bryan Welch** at bryanw@oaap.org.